Coping With Grief & Loss



Grief is the normal response of sorrow, emotion, and confusion that comes from losing someone or something important to you. It is a natural part of life. Grief is a typical reaction to death, divorce, job loss, a move away from family and friends, or loss of good health due to illness.

How does grief feel?

Just after a death or loss, you may feel empty and numb, as if you are in shock. You may notice physical changes such as trembling, nausea, trouble breathing, muscle weakness, dry mouth, or trouble sleeping and eating. You may become angry—at a situation, a particular person, or just angry in general. Almost everyone in grief also experiences guilt. Guilt is often expressed as "I could have, I should have, and I wish I would have" statements. People in grief may have strange dreams or nightmares, be absent-minded, withdraw socially, or lack the desire to return to work. While these feelings and behaviors are normal during grief, they will pass

How long does grief last?

Grief lasts as long as it takes you to accept and learn to live with your loss. For some people, grief lasts a few months. For others, grieving may take years. The length of time spent grieving is different for each person. There are many reasons for the differences, including personality, health, coping style, culture, family background, and life experiences. The time spent grieving also depends on your relationship with the person lost and how prepared you were for the loss.

Tips for Coping with Grief

- Take your time. Grief is often not a quick process. Coping doesn't mean you no longer feel pain, but rather that you feel the grief and also find ways to move forward.
- Don't judge or measure your reactions by those of other people. Each person is unique and experiences losses differently than others.
- Talk with others. Share your feelings and the meaning this loss has for you.
- Surround yourself with friends and family who love and support you. Avoid isolation.
- Tears may come unexpectedly and at times when you thought you were finished grieving. Be patient with yourself. Their intensity and frequency should diminish with time.
- Allow yourself to grieve as well as giving yourself breaks from the grieving process.
- If you follow a religious faith, this can be a time for prayer and quiet meditation. Seek out your faith mentors.
- Exercise if you are able and eat a balanced diet. Avoid alcohol and the use other mood-altering drugs.
- Learn to be sensitive and flexible with your needs and lifestyle.
- Seek professional help if feelings of grief persist, intensify, or seem severe

How does grief differ from depression?

Depression is more than a feeling of grief after losing someone or something you love. Clinical depression is a whole-body disorder. It can take over the way you think and feel. Symptoms of depression include:

- A sad, anxious, or "empty" mood that won't go away
- Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy
- Low energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Loss of appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feeling hopeless or gloomy
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Thoughts of death or suicide or a suicide attempt

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How will I know when I'm done grieving?

Every person who experiences a death or other loss must complete a four-step grieving process:

1. Accept the loss.
2. Work through and feel the physical and emotional pain of grief.
3. Adjust to living in a world without the person or item lost.
4. Move on with life. The grieving process is over only when a person completes the four steps. Each person is unique and moves through these steps at their own pace. Often this is not a quick process

What if these feelings won't go away?

If you recently experienced a death or other loss, feelings of grief are part of a natural and normal reaction. However, if these feelings persist, intensify, or seem severe, please seek help. Resources you may turn to include your doctor or primary health care provider, community-based bereavement programs, counseling services, a faith-based group, or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP services are confidential and are provided by your employer at no cost to you. Employees and their dependent family members are eligible for EAP services.